

A MESSAGE TO THE MEMBERS ACTS 2.42 – 1 JOHN 1.7

Last week, I interrupted our study through the book of Acts to take some time out to talk to you heart to heart about things related to the church.

Last week's sermon, "A Message from the Pastor," was long and covered a lot of material. It was originally intended to be just one sermon dealing with a subject that we needed to cover, but as this past week went on, I realized that there is more that I need to say related to the subject of the church.

This week, the sermon is "A Message to the Members."

As I studied *Experiencing God* this week, I was intrigued with the word that was central in this week's lesson, *koinonia*.

As a result, I began to study the word independently of the prepared study and was moved to talk to you this week about the meaning and the application of this biblical concept.

As the week has gone by, God has given me several occasions to use the material from my study. I even used it in a pre-marital counseling session on Friday.

When we understand the meaning of the word fellowship as it is used in Scripture, we soon realize that our concept of fellowship is somewhat removed from the biblical meaning.

When we refer to fellowship, we typically think about getting together with other members of the church for a time of talking, sharing, getting to know each other better, and, above all things, eating.

Someone said that it is what Baptist's do best.

Yet the truth of that statement is an indication that we have missed a very valuable lesson from Scripture about God's purpose for His church and the real meaning of fellowship.

So, let's look more closely at this *koinonia*.

The word *koinonia* is used 20 times in the NT. It is usually translated as **fellowship**, and that is the way it is translated the first time it is used in the NT.

I. *Koinoinia* is **fellowship**. Acts 2.42. (READ)

The word "they" in this verse refers to the "souls" in verse 41 who were added to "them" – a reference to the disciples who had experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The disciples, both old and new, continued in four things:

- Apostles' doctrine
- Fellowship
- Breaking of bread
- Prayers

It is interesting to note that, if the Holy Spirit meant for this list to indicate an order of things, fellowship follows faith or belief.

Notice two points here:

1. What was the Apostles' doctrine?

The subject of all of their sermons throughout the book of Acts and in the epistles is **Christ**. He came from the throne of glory to live as a man among men that He might die for man's sin and be resurrected from the grave to give us life – not for our sakes, but for the glory of the Father.

2. Notice that Luke did not refer to the believers as "the church," because at this point in the story, the disciples knew nothing of the church. They did not love their church or feel a bond to their church or feel the need to defend their church. It was not the church that they had in common – it was **Christ**.

F.W. Grant: "...the force of irresistible attraction which drew them as to a common center, drew them to one another."

In other words, our fellowship with one another is directly related to our fellowship with Christ.

A church that cannot find unity among its members should look first to the relationship that its members have with Christ.

When we are confirmed in our doctrines and our beliefs – when we are committed in our relationship with the God who called us to salvation – then we will be drawn together in a close and intimate fellowship with each other for the purpose of...

- communion (worship directed toward God) and
- prayer (communication with God)

II. *Koinonia* is **communion**. 1 Cor. 10.16; 2 Cor. 6.14

When we partake of the bread and of the juice, we are expressing our understanding that we are in communion – that we are all of us partakers of the blood of Christ.

Communion is not about our being in fellowship with each other as much as it is about our being in close fellowship with Christ. Jesus said, “**Do this in remembrance** – not of your salvation – **but of me.**”

When we improve our communion with Christ, we will, as a natural result, improve our relationship with each other.

III. *Koinonia* is **contribution** as well as **distribution**. Rom. 15.26-27; 2 Cor. 8.1-5; 2 Cor. 9.12-14

In these verses, the word *koinonia* refers to service and benevolence.

The church at Jerusalem was in a financial crisis as a result of a famine in the land. The other churches scattered across the Roman Empire gathered their resources and made a financial **contribution** to the church at Jerusalem to relieve their suffering.

In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul calls attention to the presence of *koinonia* found among the churches of Macedonia and Greece. (A form of the word *koinonia* is in verse 27, translated as partakers or those who share.)

Then, in his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul elaborates on how this contribution – this fellowship of ministering to the saints – came to be. **2 Cor. 8.1-5**

Then, in **2 Cor. 9.12-14**, Paul explains to the church at Corinth why this attitude of fellowship – *koinonia* (translated here as **distribution**) – is so important in God’s plan for the church.

NLT: 12 So two good things will result from this ministry of giving – the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. 13 As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. 14 And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. 15 Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!

Paul says to the church at Corinth, “You need to model yourself after these sister churches for by your participation in missions, those who receive your gift will give God glory.”

The generosity of your contribution and its distribution (your *koinonia*) is proof to all other believers of your fellowship (your *koinonia*) with Christ.

Our confession of the lordship of Christ and our submission to His call on our lives always leads us to participation in missions and to making a contribution and a distribution to those in need which ultimately leads to God getting glory – which is the ultimate goal of missions and therefore, the ultimate goal of the church.

Related to the ideas of contribution and distribution...

IV. *Koinonia* is **communication**. Hebrews 13.15-16

The idea of *koinonia* in this verse is that of sharing and is closely related to the word sacrifice in the second half of the verse.

It means that God has called us to give up those material things of this world that seem so precious to us and to make their value available for the benefit of others.

That is another whole sermon for another time. But the idea is that fellowship is not an end, but a means to an end.

It is the Christian responding to the call of God on his life to practical Christianity – to be involved in benevolence, in ministry, and in missions.

Philemon 1.4-7

In verse 6, the word is translated **communication**, but the idea is the same.

NLT: I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ.

Paul is saying to Philemon that as you grow closer and more intimate with Christ, the result should be that you will be better prepared to put your profession into practice – you will put feet to your faith.

Finally, let's look once more at verses where the word *koinonia* is translated as **fellowship**.

1 John 1.3-7

John said that he taught what he had seen and heard concerning the teaching of Christ for the purpose of making fellowship possible among those to whom he was writing.

Not just any fellowship – not just companionship or interpersonal relationships – but about the only fellowship that matters when measured against eternity – that of our fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

This goes back to our first verse, Acts 2.42, and confirms the idea that true fellowship – *koinonia* – is possible only in the presence of sound doctrine and an active faith.

John said here is the message we preach (verse 5): God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

The purest doctrine is that which concentrates all of its focus on the God...

- who created us for His purposes
- who is sovereign in all things
- by Whom all things consist
- who set the worlds in place and sees each sparrow that falls
- who established a plan of redemption before the foundation of the world and then set the wheels of creation in motion so that men may benefit from its application.

1 John 1.3 says that we experience fellowship – *koinonia* – with the Father as we hear and respond to the message of Christ.

1 Cor. 1.9 says that we are called into fellowship – *koinonia* – with Christ by a faithful God

2 Cor. 13.14 says that fellowship – *koinonia* – is completed when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

1 John 1.7 says that we have fellowship – *koinonia* – with one another when our lives and our conduct are regulated by the light that God has revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

When we look at all the Bible has to say about fellowship, we are drawn to the conclusion that fellowship is never portrayed as an end product but as a by-product. (Warren Doud)

If we walk in the light – if our lives reflect the glory of God and we are obedient to His commands and we follow in His purpose – the result will be fellowship.

As we grow closer in our fellowship with God by our obedience, we will naturally grow in fellowship with one another.

In its original usage, *koinonia* referred to “a joint participation in a common interest and activity.” (Wuest)

It refers to the same relationship that should exist within a marriage. If the only reason we get married is for all of the “warm and fuzzy” feelings we experience by being in fellowship with the person we married, then it's no wonder that our divorce rate exceeds 50%.

When God created man and woman and put them in the Garden, He commanded them to have children – to fill the earth with His glory.

The marriage relationship is a joint venture of two people coming together as one – to be of one mind and body – to share in the accomplishment of a shared task – that of filling the earth with the glory of God.

We may be attracted to one another by good looks, or sex, or money, but most of us realize that none of those things can sustain a marriage.

Not even commitment to one another is enough to sustain a marriage. All who are married made the same vow to one another: to live together and to be committed to one another until death do us part, and most who make that vow are serious when they make it, but their marriage falls apart anyway.

The only way to sustain a marriage – to reach the intimacy of fellowship with each other that God intended – is through our covenant with Him.

As we grow in our relationship with Him – as we are obedient to His call – then we grow in relationship with one another as God intended and as we desire.

It is true in marriage; it is true in the church.

We have been given the gift of grace by the will of God in salvation. We have been reconciled to the Father and He has been reconciled to us by the blood of Jesus Christ, which makes *koinonia* possible.

Yet *koinonia* grows toward perfection only as we are obedient.

Koinonia is an action word. It is not about being, but about doing.

Phil. 1.3-6

In these verses, Paul commends the church at Philippi, not for their love for one another, but for their love with one another for the gospel – for carrying the message of Christ to the rest of the world.

That phrase “in the gospel” contains the idea of moving toward a goal. The preposition “in” is a word of motion (Wuest).

William Hendrickson: *Koinonia* “is a fellowship of grace – not a man-made...relationship.”

Without the call of God our fellowship would be no more effective than any of the social clubs in town.

“It would be impossible to form on a human level because it transcends time and space, and will endure forever.”

It is something that no one person can accomplish. It is something that requires a crowd – a group of people who have been filled with the Holy Spirit and work together to accomplish the purposes of God.

Bob Gilliam, bible.org

...the very nature of God’s plan necessitates the Godly capacities of many individuals added together to show His perfections to the world. You might say that God’s plan must be compared not to a solo but to a symphony. Its beauty is impossible to capture in one note no matter how loud. Only by a full orchestra playing together can the beautiful harmony be fully captured. And this is what the Church is, God’s orchestra! In order to fully manifest God, each person must not only play his part but must play it together. So in God’s symphony – His plan, the score is the Bible which reveals His Son, Jesus Christ. The instruments are our spiritual gifts and natural abilities. And the indispensable means we use to perform is fellowship, our co-participation in accomplishing His purpose. It is only as we work together in this way that it is possible to accomplish God’s plan. This is why fellowship is indispensable to the church.

Bruce Hurt, preceptaustin.org

A person filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit rejoices in Christian fellowship. In fact, there is nothing in the world as wonderful as Christian fellowship. Those in the church who spend their time looking for what isn’t perfect demonstrate an absence of spiritual joy. They need to consider the

partnership they have – the people who pray for them, enable them to serve Christ, care for them, meet their needs, work with their children and family, nurture them in spiritual truth, and who are available for them to minister to by the use of their own spiritual gifts. If a Christian can't rejoice in that, the problem is not on the outside – it's inside.

In summary, then, fellowship – *koinonia* – is the relationship that is birthed in God's people when they are called by God to salvation and which grows to maturity as God's people become partakers together in the common objective of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Fellowship begins with salvation.

It grows and develops through obedience.